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## News and Notes

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### God is a Spirit.

**I**N conversation with Muslims about the Godhead, it is inevitable that we should use at some time those words of our Lord in John iv: 24. "God is a spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." It is remarkable that when we do so, there is a marked reluctance on the part of the Muslim to accepting this statement. Some will even go so far as to reject the statement altogether. It is wise, therefore, that we should try to understand the grounds for their objection to the words. If reference is made to that excellent little book, *The Holy Spirit in Quran and Bible* by Mylrea and Abdu'l Masih, (C.L.S.), much useful information may be gathered on the meaning of the word *ruh*, as it is understood in Islam. From this book it will become abundantly plain how bewildered Muslims are when they try to shew what is meant by the term.

The vast majority of Muslims with whom we have discussed the matter have interpreted *Ruh* as referring to Gabriel or Jesus and have excused themselves from further discussion by referring to Surah xvii. 87. "They will ask thee of the Spirit; Say, 'The spirit is at my Lord's command; but of knowledge only a little is given unto you.'" They are afraid to commit themselves to any definite statement in view of this verse, and try to protect themselves by assuming an agnostic position.

Reference to Lane's Dictionary is very instructive. The main points are summarised below:—

1. The general significance of *Ruh* is similar to that of *nafs*, though in some respects different. It means the vital principle, a subtle vaporous substance, which is the principle of vitality, sensation and voluntary action and is called sometimes *ruh-i-haiwaniya*. An alternative somewhat similar is that it is a subtle body, the source of which is the hollow of the corporeal heart and which diffuses itself into

all the other parts of the body by means of the pulsing veins or arteries. We find a similar idea in the Old Testament cf. Gen. ix. 4. the blood was considered the seat of the vital principle. Al-Faiyumi in the *Misbah* says that the philosophers make *Ruh* and *blood* equivalent in meaning because by the exhaustion of it life ceases.

2. The usual view of the Sunnis and the orthodox is that *Ruh* is the rational soul known as *nafs-un-natiga* or an-nafs-ul-insani. It is adapted to the faculty of making known ideas by means of speech and of understanding speech. It is peculiarly a *human* endowment. Hence when the word *Ruh* is used it is most readily understood as referring to human nature. It does not perish with the body being a substance and not an accident. This fact is referred to, so they say, in Sur. iii. 163. (The popular idea often thinks of it as going into the grave with the dead body).

3. The third classification of meanings is concerned with it as signifying inspiration or the result of inspiration *i.e.*, divine revelation. Surahs xvi. 2 and xl. 15 are referred to. "He throws the spirit upon whom He will of His servants, to give warning of the day of meeting." So *ruh* becomes synonymous with the Quran in certain passages.

4. The fourth main category is that which applies the word to supra-mundane creatures. It may be used of Gabriel (Surah xxvi. 193). According to Ibn Abbas and the *Taj-ul-Arus* it means an angel in the seventh heaven whose face is like a man's and whose body is that of an angel. Commenting on Surah lxxviii. 38, some would think it refers to certain creatures resembling mankind but not men. Others, going into greater detail would say that the spirits are watchers over the sons of Adam. Their faces are like men's faces and they are unseen by the other angels, even as men do not see the watchers nor the other angels.

From the foregoing it will be at once quite plain that there will be grave doubt in the mind of our Muslims friends as to the propriety of speaking of God as a spirit so long as we do not dissociate ourselves from such a strange psychology and do not explain, as far as that is possible, what significance we attach to the term. What, to us, is the very negation of crude anthropomorphism may be regarded by them as utterly anthropomorphic, especially as the prevalent idea is that spirit is not immaterial but extremely subtle material substance.

How then shall we explain this term. We are not unaware of the difficulty in interpreting it. At the outset it is wise to draw attention to the circumstances in which our Lord made use of the phrase. He was in conversation with the Samaritan woman, who wanted to argue about the worship of God as if His presence were localized either in Mount Gerizim or Jerusalem. Christ teaches in these words that the essential Being of God is not such that it may be confined to a place; and, as Bernard points out in his commentary, the translation would be better if instead of the words, "God is a spirit," we had the words "God is spirit." In this, Bernard follows

Westcott, who goes on to say that the reference is to God's nature rather than His personality.

It must, however, be apparent that beyond the merely negative idea of immateriality, we approach most nearly to an understanding of what spirit is when we interpret it in terms of personality. We know through our own consciousness what spirit is. "Man has a body, but *is* a spirit and is conscious of himself as a spirit,—that is, as a being who thinks and feels and wills. These are the essential powers of a spirit, and it is from our own possession of these powers that we know what it means that God is a spirit. . . . If the negative meaning is that God is other than matter, the more helpful positive meaning is that God is other than matter in the same way as man, by possessing these powers of thought, affection and will. . . . The composition of spirit we may never understand; but this is the action of spirit, and this is intelligible." W. N. Clarke, *Outline of Christian Theology*, pp. 66-67.

In the article on Omnipresence in the *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, the writer warns us against speaking of God as filling all space when we try to give some idea of His omnipresence as Martensen, (*Christian Dogmatics* p. 93) and Strong, (*Manual of Theology* p. 132) do, and approves W. N. Clarke's words from his *Outline* p. 79, which are as follows;—"By omnipresence, we do not mean a presence of God which fills all space, in the manner we think of matter as filling certain parts of space. It is not universal diffusion of the essence of God like diffusion of the atmosphere." The writer of the article goes on to say, "To introduce the idea of God's filling space is at once inevitably to suggest materialist analogies, as air fills the atmosphere, or the luminiferous ether fills all space, and all such analogies are misleading. The saving clause introduced by Dr. Strong and others, that God fills all his universe 'without diffusion or expansion,' does not help us; it merely makes the definition self-contradictory."

Palmer, in his little book on *Oriental Mysticism*, now unfortunately out of print, shews us how Sufi thought verges on a quasi-materialistic view of the nature of God by a most unfortunate use of an illustration to interpret the attribute *al-Latif*. Here, though the intention is to prove God immaterial, the net result is an idea that God is a greatly attenuated and subtle material substance. We quote the passage in full.

"Earth is dense, water compared with earth is subtle, air is more subtle than water, fire is more subtle than air; and the subtle occupies a higher position in the scale of creation than the dense. Now although each of these four elements occupies a distinct position in nature, they are susceptible of commixture, and are determined the one by the other. If for instance, a vessel be completely filled with earth, there will still be space for water; and when it will contain no more water, it will admit of the introduction of air, and when it will

contain no more air, it will admit of the introduction of fire; the comprehensive and penetrating capacities of each, being in proportion to their relative densities. It will now be observed that there is no particle of the earth in the vessel but is commingled with the water, and so on of the other three elements, each occupying its distinct and proper position according to its density. It is from the proper gradation and arrangement of these four elements in the world that the phenomena of nature arise; but they are nevertheless susceptible of commixture and conjunction... If all this be possible then in the case of material elements, how much more possible is it in the case of the nature of God, which is immaterial and indivisible." pp. 24-26,

Frequently in a desire to avoid the interpretation of God's nature in terms of personality, God is made *less* than personal and however much emphasis the Sufi would make on the last few words of the above passage, the danger is very great that God will be conceived by the aid of such illustrations as a greatly attenuated and subtle material substance. What we are conscious of in the operations of thought, whereby man brings the distant near, and in memory, wherein the limitations of time are to some extent transcended, brings us far nearer to the understanding of spiritual omnipresence. So that we should be on safe ground in attempting our explanation of the meaning of 'spirit' if we confined ourselves to the 'personal,' though this in its turn will raise questions in the mind of our Muslim friend. God willing we shall return to this point in our next number.

J. W. S.

## Notes from the Muslim Press.

### The Muslim Revival. (Lahore).

HERE appears in the September and December number of this journal an article from the pen of S. Hamid Raza, B.A., (Aligarh) entitled, "Dean Inge's Homage to Muhammad." The alleged homage is to be found, according to the writer of the article, in some words contained in Dean Inge's book "*God and the Astronomers*" pp. 16-17, as follows:—

"Heaven is not a geographical expression. Astronomy has disposed of that notion for good and all. We cannot picture the eternal world to ourselves without free use of symbols taken from space and time, which are necessary forms of our thought, and I do not think we need try to banish these pictures, without which our thoughts of "heaven," the spiritual world, which is the supreme reality, inevitably become nebulous and unsubstantial. *But symbols they are of a state of existence which eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.*" (The italics are S. Hamid Raza's).

The writer comments on this as follows :—“This passage from Dean Inge's book is nothing short of a miracle and requires some elucidation. It is entirely a subconscious reproduction of Muhammad's own teaching on Heaven. To be more exact (! ! !) the italicised sentence is *an exact translation of the Prophet's own comment on the (sic) Heaven*. . . . The Dean's quotation of the italicised portion is a mere torso of the Prophet's many-membered pithy aphorism that has existed complete to this day in the Book of Traditions compiled by Bukhari. It would not be out of place to mention that the maxim has been so constantly employed to depict a certain state of perfection by a host of English writers like John Bunyan, Oliver Lodge and H. G. Wells, etc., that it has got a wide currency in the English language and literature. The saying probably crept into the European literatures from the Muslim Spain which was the torch-bearer of Muslim culture and learning in the Middle Ages when Europe was sunk deep in the darkness of ignorance and superstition. The Illiterate Prophet was the first to utter these noble words in the sixth century A.D., but just mark their constant re-echoes in the 'Corridors of Time.' This is how the great Prophet interpreted the Heaven 1350 years ago, and to-day, to our great surprise, Dean Inge with all his deep and laborious researches in the domain of Science and Religion, pays his homage to Muhammad by giving a *verbatim* copy of the Prophet's own comment on Heaven.”

There are five pages of this sort of thing. We have here another example of misrepresentation, (whether due to ignorance or not we cannot say) an unpleasant characteristic of present-day Muslim journalism. It is lamentable that a man who should be able to trace the use of this text (from 1 Corinthians 2 : 9.) in the works of Bunyan and Oliver Lodge, etc., should be so ignorant of the origin of it. If we look at the tradition in *Mishkat ul Masabih*, (Goldsack's English translation pp. 277-278 or Arabic, *Kitab-ul-Fitani fi sifat-il-Janati wa Ahliha*, the first tradition) we shall see that this is a tradition of the class *Hadith Qudsi* in which the words of God are quoted. Hence, the probability is that the reference is to the Christian Scriptures, the divine inspiration of which is taken for granted or, if our Muslim friend will not have it so and claims the words as a direct revelation of God to the Prophet, then we should be rather inclined to see in it one of the many plagiarisms of the Hadith wherein miracles and sayings of Christ and passages from the Bible are attributed to Muhammad.

#### Ma'arif, (Azamgarh).

In the January number of this Urdu monthly prominence is given a report of a census taken in America and published in the 'Literary Guide' under the direction of J. H. Leuba, of the beliefs of professors and students in American Colleges. It is pointed out that the Christian conception of God does not find acceptance with a

majority and that as students rise in the Colleges they tend more and more to unbelief.

A report is given of the meeting of the Italian Society of Sciences at which Domenico Argentieri gave a lecture disproving the commonly held date of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ and placing it in the year 11 B.C. on December 25th. No comment is made, but the reason why this has been served up for the consumption of the readers of *Ma'arif*, is most probably to imply the uncertainty of important Christian data, (see extract from *The Light* below).

In the forefront is an account of the Islamic Research Association which has been started in Bombay of which the President is H. H. Aga Khan and which numbers among its members Massignon of Paris, Margoliouth of Oxford, Nicholson of Cambridge, Fischer of Leipzig and Wensinck of Leyden.

#### **The Light, (Lahore).**

Muslims constantly assert that the West professes to believe in Christ's teaching but in practice uses force and that Islam is more candid and consistent; it combines love and force. In this connection the following, which appeared in *The Light* of December 1st last is of interest.

"According to Islam, all religions have been revealed from one Source and all had the same fundamentals—worship of the One Almighty and love of fellow-beings. . . . The Mosaic dispensation laid stress on man's chivalrous and courageous aspects while it had very little to say about his gentler and kinder nature. Christianity or the true teachings of Christ, laid an unbounded emphasis on the latter while giving no regulations about the former. But Islam, the religion of the Quran, is a happy blend of both the sides of man. It says that man should forgive where forgiveness is necessary, then the evil-doer may be punished in proportion to the evil he has done. Thus Islam is a complete and perfect code while previous revelations were one-sided. . . . Where can we get the purer teachings of Christ when admittedly the present Gospels were written several centuries after his death and are full of interpolations? But not so with the Quran which stands word for word, and letter for letter, the same as it was 13 centuries ago when it was first revealed."

### **Music Before Mosques.**

**I**N the *Hyderabad Bulletin* we read of the orders by the Nizam's Government with regard to this vexed question.

In April 1934, a commission was appointed to prepare a report. It was clear that according to the Mohammedan Religion playing of music during prayers was forbidden, that silence ought to be observed

and that no hindrance should occur during prayer time. To meet the requirements of the situation certain proposals were made in the report and these now become operative.

The following is a summary of the report according to the *Bulletin* :—

“1. If a mosque is situated adjoining a road and the length of the road is estimated to be 100 ft. it is directed that music passing through that road should cease to play when within 40 ft. of the mosque.

2. Similarly music should cease within 40 ft., of any road passing by either side of a mosque.

3. As it appears necessary among certain communities to play music every now and then, such people taking music through a road adjacent to which a mosque is situated, should cease to play music only during prayer time.

The orders prescribe the following hours as prayer time :—

(a) Namaz Fazar, (Fajr) one hour before sunrise, (b) Namaz Zahar, (Zuhr) 1.30 to 2 30 p.m., (c) Namaz Asar, (Asr) 5 to 5.30 p.m., (d) Namaz Maghrib, half an hour after sunset, and (e) Namaz Usha ('Asha) 8 to 9 p.m.

The playing of music is forbidden within the limits and during the hours prescribed above. Shouts of 'Jai, Jai', clapping of hands and all other kinds of noise are also disallowed. The disobedience of this law will be punished with simple imprisonment extending to one month, or with fine extending to Rs. 200 or both. The police can take cognizance of such cases, which shall be heard by a First Class Magistrate. The circular concludes by explaining that the present orders will not affect the special orders previously passed relating to places surrounding mosques and their precincts.”

K. G.

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### **Praise and Prayer.**

**PRAISE** God for the Mission to Moslems in Capetown and pray for the workers of the Mission and success to their labours.

**LET US PRAY** for the Henry Martyn School and the success of its appeal to the churches.

**LET US PRAY** that unoccupied stations where there was once definite evangelistic work among Muslims, may be re-occupied by specially equipped workers.

**PRAY** for recovery and revival of all our work in 1935.

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**Notice.**

Any notification of change of address, names of new members or remittance of subscription, etc., should be sent to the Superintendent, Orissa Mission Press, Cuttack, India, and *not* to the Secretary of the League. The annual subscription to the League, is Rs. 2-0-0 (English 3s. od.)

Matters of interest to members of the League, items of news and requests for prayer should be sent (if possible, early in the month) to the Hony. Secretary :—

Rev. J. W. Sweetman,  
5, Egerton Road,  
Lahore,  
Panjab, India.

